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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0832 08/11/06

~ Online Free Speech Woe ~ People Are Talking! ~ eBay Slide Show!
~ LinuxWorld Next Week! ~ Apple Previews Leopard ~ AOL Privacy Screw-up
~ Pac-Man Goes Digital! ~ Google Protects Users! ~ IE 7+ Name Dropped!

~ Web Solicitation Drops ~ Apple Dumps Power Mac! ~ AOL E-mail Domains!

-* Cybercrime Treaty Ratified! *-
-* GFA Basic Compiler/Linker Update! *-
-* Dem's Senate Campaign Alleges Cyberattack! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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What a fantastic week it's been so far! No extreme temperatures to endure, no thunderstorms (yet!), and plenty of relaxation. I played golf twice this week to make up for missed opportunities last week. I had lunch with a group of friends from my old job - nice to see the old gang, and learn that the place isn't the same without me! Some friends came over and we sat around and had a few drinks. And, I even managed to get a little work done around the house, but not much this week. I guess that will wait for the weekend.

I'm amazed at the amount of work that there is to do around the house, now that I have the time to really look at it and get many things done. But now I don't wonder why I could never get these things done year after time - not enough time! I remember that when we were getting ready to buy our house that many friends told us that you don't own the house - the house owns you! I can now admit that this is true. Joe, remember that now that you're a new homeowner! While it's true that I've probably taken on some projects that I might not have done, but eventually these things would have needed doing. But, I'm enjoying doing these things, and getting a sense of satisfaction once they've been completed. And, I also don't feel like I'm just sitting around the house doing little while my wife leaves for work every day! So, retirement has been good to me, at least for now. It feels comfortable to me, and I feel that I deserve the break from the years of stress on the [real] job. It's too bad that the economy won't allow more of us to do this rather than waiting until we're almost in the grave and too old or ailing to enjoy it! Well, enough of my contentment for now - let's get to another issue of A-ONE!

Until next time...

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GFA-Basic Compiler/Linker Update

GFA-Compiler (revision 10)
GFA-Linker (revision 7)

- Bug related to $X with VAR fixed

- Bug related to $X with FUNCTIONs fixed
- Norwegian translation added (thanks to Ozk)

It’s now possible to properly link DRI object files to and type of PROCEDURE or FUNCTION, with or without pointers (VAR).

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This has been a tough week for me. I mean REALLY tough!

As you may (or may not) know, Lisa and I recently bought a house. Well, after all the heat and humidity, the bronchitis that she came down with, the broken toe that I had (I STILL say that’s a dumb place to put a couch), and the sinus infections that we’ve both had, we had to prevail upon our landlord’s good nature and ask for an extra week to get things packed up and out.

Our landlord and landlady are terrific people, and we’ve gotten along quite well for the past 12 years. They gave us the time we needed without any problem (they weren’t going to rent the place out again without some renovations), and we knuckled under and got the basement cleared out.

The reason we’ve both had upper respiratory problems is that we’ve been spending time in the basement, getting things packed up or thrown out. It’s incredibly damp down there, and the mold is thick in the air. It’s not visible anywhere, but since I’m allergic to mold spores, I’ve very sensitive to it. Trust me, it’s down there.

That brings me to the ’really tough’ part. I have packed more and more of my precious ST software in boxes downstairs, waiting for the day we finally bought our own house and had room for a real, honest-to-goodness computer room. Well all those manuals and boxes were soft, damp and... well, really kind of disgusting. The disks were useless as well. The metal shutters were, in some cases, rusted, the mylar disc inside was often frozen in place. No fewer than one hundred commercial disks, and no fewer than 300 data and backup disks were lost.

I sat there, folks, on the damp, dank concrete floor and simply stared off into space. All my plans for the future... a place to set up my TT and a 1040 or two... networking them all together along with my Mac, WinTel and Linux machines.... all gone. Sure, I’ve still got the TT and STs and whatever can be salvaged from their now-ancient hard drives, but all the originals are gone... I can’t even name all the programs that are no more. It just ticks me off too much.

So... that’s been MY week. I hope yours was better.

Now let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info available every week.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

’Ryan’ asks about universal power supplies:

"Hi there. After using an Atari ST briefly in the mid 90’s I finally got one myself last year and have been enjoying using it with Notator to control my MIDI rig. I’m living in Germany, where STs are plentiful, and I got mine for 10 Euros, which was overpriced, but there we are.

Now it happens that I’ve decided to move back to the States, and since STs are much harder to find in the U.S. and much more expensive I’m considering bringing mine with me, only I’ve realized with some dismay that the bottom of my STf says "220-240V 50Hz" which as we know is not gonna cut it in the States without some expensive converter which I’d rather avoid.

So the question is: Did any STs come with universal power supplies? If I’m going to bother bringing an ST across the Atlantic I figure it may as well be a Mega STE, since that’s the latest and greatest that’ll run Notator as far as I know, but I only want to bother with that if I can be relatively sure that it’ll work on U.S. power.

If there were none with universal power supplies, then I imagine getting a U.S. power supply would be just as difficult/expensive as getting the whole machine once I’m back, in which case I’d forget about trying to ship it from here and just get it there. What do you think?

Anyone else have experience bringing STs from Germany to the States? There seems to be some demand in the U.S., and a ridiculous supply in Germany.

Thanks for any help or suggestions.

P.S: Nice group you have here! I’ve enjoyed reading over the posts of the last half year."

Peter West tells Ryan:

"I don’t think there were any universal PSs, but a small auto-transformer 220-120V should do you. Not expensive The difference in frequency should not matter, as Ataris use switch-mode PSs.

Alternatively, you should be able to buy a 120V power supply board from Best Electronics of San Jose - see www.best-electronics-ca.com or email Brad Coda at bestelec@sbcglobal.net"

Ronald Hall adds:

"Hmm, it seems to me, you've got a couple of options, as far as the P/S goes.

You can replace the P/S with a US one, Best Electronics sells them for about $115.00, last time I checked.

You could try to get a used one from Ebay. I did this just recently, picking up one for my Mega STe for $36.00, and it worked fine.

There's probably another option as well. You can use a cheap ATX power supply to run STs. I did this with my Falcon for awhile, until I got my CT60 accelerator (which the ATX P/S plugs straight into). It does require a little rewiring, but works. I'm not sure if you could find one of those micro units that would cosmetically match up to the Mega STe and fit inside without some "engineering" though."

Ryan replies:

"Thanks for the responses. I looked up step-up converters today and indeed they don't look as expensive as I had thought.

However, I also asked two sellers of Mega STEs here in Germany and they both claim it says "100-120 ~ 50/60Hz 3.0A, 200-240 ~ 50/60Hz 1.5A" underneath, whereas my STf clearly says "220/240V~ 50Hz 0.5A". One seller was kind enough to photograph the bottom of his. See:

http://www.ryandesign.com/tmp/mega_ste_underside.jpg

So it looks like I'm in luck! I guess I'll get me one of those Mega STEs then. I'll let you know how it goes!"

Alan Hourihane asks about some screen artifacts that he's seeing:

"I have a Mega STE with 4MB RAM.

When powering up the screen at certain vertical positions has sparkly effects as though the RAM was bad - but it's not.....

The memory tests are fine, and I've swapped them as well with the same problem.

The sparkle effect tends to disappear after a few minutes of warm up though.

Anyone any ideas what could cause this?"

Mark Duckworth tells Alan:

"I had a similar issue with mine and had a stack of shifter chips to replace. My video shifter was going bad. I recall there's a bad version of the PLCC shifter and a better one. The bad one broke, the better one worked."

Frank Szymanski adds:

"Could you try to play some MOD-Files in STEREO on your MSTE (perhaps with Paula or some similar programs)?

If you hear crackling sound your MSTE is one of a few machines with a bad GST-MCU/GLUE. In this case all you can do is to change this chip (C300589-001 U501).

I once had a MSTE like that and I also had the impression that after a few minutes after warmup it disappeared but the crackling sound still remained."

Alan does some checking and tells Frank:

"Ah, thanks Frank. I've googled a bit more about this and it seems the IC is C301712-001, which is the IC that has the fault, whereas the replacement is C300588-001.

Can anyone confirm this, as I do have the C301712-001 device."

Ronald Hall asks Alan:

"Alan, just a thought - but do you have a 2nd monitor to try, just in case its the monitor and not the Mega STe itself? Or a 2nd ST to try with that monitor? Would rule out that possibility anyway..."

Alan comes at it from the other side and tells Ronald:

"I use the monitor everyday with my TT and Falcon, so I know it's not the monitor."

Ryan now turns his attention toward keyboards and posts:

"I haven't really paid much attention to the Atari Megas before (having used a 1040 STf) but now that I'm looking for a Mega STE I'm seeing two different keyboards depicted:

One that looks like this, with diagonal function keys and which bears a good resemblance to a 1040 STf and looks pretty neat:

http://mpc.fab.free.fr/atari/atari16-32/photo16-32/megalateral.jpg

And one that looks like this, with square function keys and IMHO an altogether more boring appearance:

http://www.betuwe.net/~mellemab/homecomputers/images/atari/Atari_Mega_STE_Large.jpg

Do each of these keyboards fit with a specific Mega, or will either keyboard work with either Mega? Is there an advantage to one or the other keyboard? (Or are there more models that I haven't found yet?) I read somewhere that one keyboard model was to be vastly preferred, but I couldn't figure out which one was meant. Going on visual appearance alone, I'd be strongly inclined to prefer the exciting diagonal function keys, but if there are other

considerations, I'd love to learn about them."

Mark Duckworth tells Ryan:

"The keyboards are interchangeable. The boring one as you say is for the Mega STe and the ST style one is for the Mega ST. I used a Mega ST keyboard with my falcon for a stint and now I use it on my Mega STe.

The Mega STe/TT keyboard kind of sucks in my opinion. The stupid mylar is always breaking on it. I have 8 mylars that are all trash in one way or another despite repeated repair attempts. The Mega ST keyboard tends to work better but can also get flaky. The Mega STe/TT keyboard has a fairly typical keyboard feel. The Mega ST keyboard has a rather unique feeling that the keys press very softly with little resistance and give a satisfying clunk as they hit the limits... Total opposite of the 520/1040 keyboards. I hate those awful spongy things."

'Coda' adds:

"What Mark said. I have examples of both, and guess what? Some keys on one of my TT keyboards don't work... bad mylar. Some people will tell you that the TT keyboard is better than the MegaST's keyboard. Don't believe em. Open up both keyboards and you'll soon see which one is superior, and why."

Peter West jumps in and asks Coda:

"Are you sure it's the mylars? I find the problem is usually with the rubber cups holding the carbon brushes - these tend to break at the bottom and then don't make proper contact. I got a replacement set of 'TT Keys' from Best Electronics, but while these gave a much better touch to the keys, they don't seem to last very long.

BTW, which Mega keyboard was made by Cherry and used real microswitches? Was it the Mega 4?"

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Pac-Man' Is Going Digital!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Dreamblade Seeks Cult Appeal!
                                     'Bully' Coming In Fall!
                                     And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

'Pac-Man' Is Going Digital

The video arcade has gone online.

The latest game of the '70s and '80s to get digital is Pac-Man, which on Wednesday joins such classics as Frogger and Galaga on Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade, which lets users digitally download and own the games. Cost: about $5 for Xbox 360 owners.

Pac-Man, now 26, has been chomping on ghosts since March on another online gaming service, GameTap. His arrival online shows how video gamemakers are following in the steps of record labels and movie studios by making their past hits available online.

Nintendo already has said its new game system, Wii, due this fall, will be able to download older games such as Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt.

Also this fall, Sony plans to offer a PlayStation One "emulator" that will let those with a PlayStation Portable download PSOne games onto their handheld game system for a small fee.

This is just the beginning, says Michael Cai of Parks Associates research firm. "Gaming companies are realizing the value that is buried in their catalog."

Money spent on online video gaming is expected to rise from $1 billion this year to $3.7 billion in 2009, says market researchers DFC Intelligence.

While Pogo.com and other well-established game centers on Yahoo and MSN.com cater to casual game players, GameTap launched last fall with a focus on games played in video game arcades, such as Asteroids and Defender, and on classic game systems like the Atari 2600 (Breakout), Intellivision (Astrosmash) and Sega Genesis (Sonic the Hedgehog).

Being able to play those arcade classics, says Stuart Snyder, general manager of GameTap, "is like hearing a song again from your past. And now a whole new generation is discovering them."

Mardi Goldman, 56, of West Los Angeles purchased the Xbox and then the Xbox 360 primarily for her son Chiam, 15. When he introduced her to the Xbox Live Arcade, she got hooked on UNO, playing with a group of "gamer chicks."

"I am able to interact with people all over the world," she says. "I've raved about this to my friends, and a few of them have gone out and got an Xbox 360, just for the arcade games."

’Dreamblade’ Seeks Cult-like Following

The company responsible for marketing successes like Dungeons & Dragons and Magic The Gathering is betting its newest game will develop the same cult-like following.

To make sure Dreamblade, a science-fiction game, hits it big with players, Wizards of the Coast Inc. is backing the game’s release with a half-million dollar tournament circuit. That’s on top of the $2 million the Renton, Wash.-based company has spent to develop and market the game that debuts Thursday at a science fiction convention in Indianapolis.

Still, Dreamblade, which is played with miniature sci-fi character figurines, faces a crowded marketplace where manufacturers and their strictly low-tech games battle for players plugged into iPods, cell phones, computers and PlayStations.

The board game, which lacks a memory chip, control panel or any other electronic feature, is like chess with monsters, warriors and other creatures battling on a paper board.

"They really want to make this the hot new thing," said Marcus King, the owner of the store Titan Games in Battle Creek, Mich. "I don’t think you can design and develop and bring about the hot new thing with marketing dollars. I’m fairly skeptical of the success they’ll have."

Instead, gamers and store owners say a success of a game has more to do with its design and construction than its publicity. A game has to be complex enough to be intriguing and appeal to the most cynical of hard-core fans, but still fun and easy to understand.

About 25,000 gamers were expected to descend on Indianapolis this weekend for the annual confab known as Gen Con where dozens of hobby game manufacturers will be hawking their latest products. Despite years of development and carefully orchestrated publicity, most of those games will fail within the first three years, according to industry officials.

In the 10 years since the meteoric debut of the trading card Pokemon, industry insiders say the game industry has become more competitive than ever, especially as the popularity of traditional board games wanes. But it’s still $2 billion in sales annually, compared to a $10 billion video game market.

Manufacturers know if they can excite players at conventions such as Gen Con - which began small in 1967 and has grown into a four-day event - they’re likely to find scores of fans who will spend thousands of dollars each year, ensuring a game’s future.

"Everyone now has visions of this mass-market success," said James Mishler, managing editor at the trade publication Comics & Games Retailer. "If you put in $2 million in mass marketing alone, you have to make back $5 million or $6 million in sales just to break even with that level of advertising. It’s a level and a kind of marketing that we haven’t seen in this industry for very long."

Retailers and developers blame hard-to-impress consumers for the tightening mainstream game market. Others cite poor literacy rates that keep players from reading sometimes voluminous rule books.

"Five years ago, you couldn’t keep board games on the shelf," said Jay Witten, the warehouse manager at Gamestation in Leitchfield, Ky. "Kids are into this technology, and board games might be a little too slow for them because we’re a hustle and bustle society."

That’s why manufacturers have their sights set on the hobby game industry - a niche market known for its devoted fans, complex rules, role-playing games, historical plots and sci-fi themes.

To woo fans, most publishers promote money-winning tournaments and give free copies to local gaming stores, hoping that back-room demonstrations attract new players.

But with dozens - and by some estimates even hundreds - of new games launched each year, getting the games into the hands of players has become even harder.

"How are these games going to move off the shelf if no one shows them how to play and we don’t do any TV advertising behind it?" said Matt Mariani, director of marketing at game maker Out of the Box Publishing Inc. "The black hole is getting bigger because retail stores are being more selective."

Out of the Box, based in Dodgeville, Wis., has seen its share of washouts.

Since its 2000 debut, Shipwrecked - a board game where players fight for food, shelter, water and friends - has sold only 20,000 units, a statistic Mariani blames on lengthy rules and too many players required for each game.

Compare that to the company’s breakaway hit, Apples to Apples, a party-themed card game that requires players to match adjectives and nouns. It has sold 2 million copies since it was launched in 1999.

"The game is a medium which players can sit around the table and discuss things," Mariani said. "The game turns out to be a shell for people to have conversations. And no computer game can compete with that."

Dreamblade is the biggest launch in years for Wizards of the Coast, a subsidiary of Pawtucket, R.I..-based toy maker Hasbro Inc.

Despite the massive pre-market campaign, online demos and yearlong tournament circuit, the game that’s targeted at males 13 and older will likely never grace the shelves of retail giants like Wal-Mart or Target. That’s not stopping its creators from hoping that it will have the longevity that so many of its competitors won’t.

"A lot of consumers, in their mind, they’re saying ’Why should I invest my time and money in this game if it’s not going to be around?’" said Greg Yahn, a senior marketing director at Wizards of the Coast. "We say, look, we’re spending all this money, we have this large organized play out there. We don’t see any end to this game."

"Bully" Video Game To Be Released in October

Rockstar, the maker of best-selling video game series "Grand Theft Auto"

said on Wednesday it would launch in October "Bully," a game with themes of school fighting that has anti-violence critics up in arms.

The game’s main character is 15-year-old Jimmy Hopkins, who must defend himself against school bullies at a fictional U.S. boarding school called Bullworth Academy, while dealing with characters ranging from nerds and jocks to authoritarian prefects.

Weapons included baseball bats that break after several blows, stink bombs and bags of marbles that when strategically thrown will lay flat most pursuers.

"Finally ’Bully’ can speak for itself. People can look at the game and see what it is and what it’s not," company spokesman Rodney Walker said.

In March, Florida’s Miami-Dade County School Board called on retailers not to sell the game to minors and required the school district to warn parents about potentially harmful effects of playing violent video games.

In a recent demonstration of "Bully," which Rockstar said has not yet been rated, the fighting scenes did not include blood or result in the death of characters.

"We think the school environment is a universal experience that so many people relate to," said Walker, who added that criticism of "Bully" is unique in that it had preceded the release of the game, which has been kept under tight wraps.

Controversial games are nothing new at Rockstar, a unit of Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., which is the developer of the best-selling urban action game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas."

That game - in which the main character robs and kills his way across a mythical U.S. state called San Andreas to save his family and take control of the streets - got caught in a scandal over an explicit sex scene known as "hot coffee," which could be unlocked with a downloaded file.

Nintendo Updates ’Mario Bros.’ With A New Bag of Tricks

Icons and legends get reinvented all the time - Batman, Madonna, the Rolling Stones come to mind.

Now, the plumber’s time has come.

In 1985, "Super Mario Bros.’’ for the Nintendo Entertainment System bounced into our lives and changed everything.

Video Game Review: New Super Mario Bros.
Publisher: Nintendo
Rated: E for Everyone
Platform: Nintendo DS
Rating: 3 1/2 stars out of 4

For lots of people, it’s what started the journey into full-fledged gamerhood. Large worlds to explore, enemies to overcome, that distinctive music - for a long time, this WAS video gaming.

More than 20 years later, a new generation gets to see what the big deal was.

Enter "New Super Mario Bros.'' for the Nintendo DS, a game sparkling with the magic of an earlier era while showing off some new tricks for one of gaming's oldest legends.

Fans of the series will relish the game's visual presentation. It's a classic, 2D side-scroller, which means all you can do is move left and right on the screen. All of the characters and levels attack the eyes with happy, lush colors and move with fluidity, reminiscent of Mario's later incarnations on the Super Nintendo.

Gameplay is old-school simple. Back in the NES days, you only used two buttons on the controller (plus the directional cross) to play.

Things haven't changed. All you really need to do is move and jump, which means people who have never played a game in their lives can pick up "New Mario'' in only a few minutes.

No matter what level you are, the experience of playing the game feels more important than actually trying to beat it. There's plenty of nostalgic stuff the fans will enjoy, but the game is bursting with loads of new content that'll win the intrepid plumber a legion of new followers.

In the old games, Mario and Luigi grabbed mushrooms and flower power-ups that would make them grow in size and give them the ability to chuck fireballs at the enemy.

There's a slew of new power-ups, including:

-- A Super Mushroom that turns Mario into a giant, giving him the ability to bulldoze through enemies and walls;

-- A blue mushroom that makes Mario tiny, which grants him access to smaller pipes that lead to hidden areas. Mini Mario also has Jordan-esque hangtime when he jumps, and he can run on water.

-- A power-up that puts Mario in a protective shell, which also lets him slide around and bowl over the bad guys.

As if that wasn't enough, Mario has apparently been doing some yoga - now he can flip, jump off walls like a ninja and use a butt-drop to crush his foes. Kids will like that one.

The top screen of the DS is where the action is, as well as a world map (reminiscent of "Super Mario World''), where players can chart their journey to rescue the princess, who's been abducted by Bowser Jr.

Along the way, you can pick new areas to explore as well as use Star Coins (another new feature) to "buy'' access to other areas. You can also "store" an extra power-up that can be accessed on the touch screen whenever you need it.

As fun as this game can be, the hardcore gamer would consider it a breeze. You're set for life when you obtain the ability to launch fireballs, and you'll be able to literally torch through the game in a few dedicated sittings. There's extra lives and power-ups galore, so there's never any sense of imminent danger when you play.

However, given the multitude of extra goodies and worlds, "New Super Mario Bros.'' is the kind of game you can go through more than once without it ever feeling repetitive. It's a great way to introduce a legend into the lives of a new audience, and it'll remind a lot of older players why they got into games in the first place.

Gen Con Makes Pitch To Replace E3

With the demise of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, smaller games conventions are lining up to court the developers - and dollars - that E3 once hosted.

In an open letter posted to the BoardgameGeek web site, the chief executive of the Gen Con exhibition said that he will encourage those companies to look at Gen Con as a forum to show their wares.

"For reasons I won't speculate about, E3 has announced that they are changing their format from that of a large trade show to a smaller event focused on meetings and the press," wrote Peter Atkinson, chief executive of Gen Con LLC.

"This has left many electronic game companies wondering about what their strategy should be in the future for the promotion of their games," Atkinson added. "Well, today we at Gen Con LLC are issuing a press release that will announce our intention to court these electronic game companies and we will describe some initiatives we are undertaking to better support electronic games."

Officials for the Entertainment Software Association originally said that the E3Expo would remain in place, but with far fewer exhibitors and a drastically reduced number of invited press. This week, however, the ESA confirmed that the E3Expo has been cancelled, and would be replaced with a smaller, more focused replacement. That, in turn, left an opportunity for rivals to step in.

"Its [sic] our plan that there will also be a bigger presence of electronic games," Atkinson added. "Electronic games are not new to Gen Con; every year several of these companies come to our show.

"Its [sic] just that this year, in the wake of the E3 announcement, we want to remind all those companies that we are here, that they are welcome, that we are eager to learn what we can do to make Gen Con support their promotional requirements, and that, as the biggest open-to-the-public games convention in North America, we are an excellent venue for launching new games or for showing support of existing games-whether those games happen to be powered by electricity or by more analog means!" Atkinson added.

Atkinson also made clear that the electronic games addition would not affect the con's traditional emphasis on more traditional gaming.

"Yes, we will be working harder to bring electronic games companies to Gen Con, but we will also continue to work hard to support the business of our current tabletop games exhibitors," Atkinson wrote. "Just as importantly, we will not be taking any steps backwards in terms of supporting programming for tabletop games. Our shows will continue to have vast amounts of space dedicated to card games, roleplaying games, miniatures game, board games, and live action roleplaying games and we will continue

to host non-gaming events of interest to gamers" including costume contests and other events, he said.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Senate Ratifies Cybercrime Treaty

The Senate has ratified a treaty under which the United States will join more than 40 other countries, mainly from Europe, in fighting crimes committed via the Internet.

The Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime, ratified late Thursday, is the first international treaty seeking to address Internet crimes by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques and increasing cooperation among nations.

The convention had been signed by 38 European nations plus the United States, Canada, Japan and South Africa, as of the end of 2005. It was opened for signature in 2001.

"While balancing civil liberty and privacy concerns, this treaty encourages the sharing of critical electronic evidence among foreign countries so that law enforcement can more effectively investigate and combat these crimes," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn.

The convention targets hackers, those spreading destructive computer viruses, those using the Internet for the sexual exploitation of children or the distribution of racist material and terrorists attempting to attack infrastructure facilities or financial institutions.

"This treaty provides important tools in the battles against terrorism, attacks on computer networks, and the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet, by strengthening U.S. cooperation with foreign countries in obtaining electronic evidence," Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said. "The Convention is in full accord with all U.S. constitutional protections, such as free speech and other civil liberties, and will require no change to U.S. laws."

Democrat's Senate Campaign Alleges Cyberattack

Aides for Democratic Senate incumbent Joe Lieberman alleged that his campaign website had been disabled by a cyberattack, and pointed the finger at supporters backing his rival in the race.

"For the past 24 hours the Friends for Joe Lieberman website and email has been totally disrupted and disabled, we believe that this is the result of

a coordinated attack by our political opponents," said Sean Smith, deputy press secretary for the campaign.

"The campaign has notified the US attorney and the Connecticut Chief State's Attorney," Smith said in a statement, adding, "the campaign will be filing a formal complaint reflecting our concerns."

Smith made a direct appeal to challenger Ned Lamont, the front runner in the Democratic primary election, to call off any of his supporters who might be behind the attack.

"We call on Ned Lamont to make an unqualified statement denouncing this kind of dirty campaign trick and to demand whoever is responsible to cease and desist immediately," Smith said.

Lieberman, 64 - Al Gore's running mate in the 2000 presidential election won by now-President George W. Bush - is hoping to eke out a come from behind victory to avoid being unseated by Lamont, a millionaire businessman.

Although a stalwart Democrat, Lieberman has been a strong supporter of the Republican administration's war in Iraq, an unpopular position in the left-leaning state.

Campaign officials said the loss of email and website access could seriously suppress support for Lieberman, making it more difficult to coordinate the get-out-the-vote effort and track precinct-by-precinct developments.

"Any attempt to suppress voter participation and undermine the voting process on Election Day is deplorable and has no place in our democracy," Smith said.

Tuesday's Democratic primary election has become a referendum on voter disgust with the war in Iraq, as Lieberman - a strong supporter of the Bush administration's policy there - fights to avoid being ousted from office.

AOL Draws Fire After Releasing User Search Data

AOL on Monday apologized for releasing information on about 20 million keyword searches in a move that ignited a firestorm of criticism about privacy rights on the Internet.

AOL, the online unit of media conglomerate Time Warner Inc., said it launched an internal investigation into how a research division of the company mistakenly released the data on its Web site about 10 days ago.

AOL released search information on about 20 million searches done from its software by about 658,000 anonymous AOL users over a three-month period, representing about one-third-of-1-percent of searches conducted over that time.

The disclosure, which AOL said was not cleared through official channels, came months after Google Inc. won kudos from privacy pundits for refusing to comply with U.S. government requests for search data on its users.

"This was a screw up, and we're angry and upset about it," said Andrew

Weinstein, an AOL spokesman. "It was an innocent-enough attempt to reach out to the academic community with new research tools, but it was obviously not appropriately vetted, and if it had been, it would have been stopped in an instant."

Although user information was not disclosed, keyword searches have included users who search their own names.

The data escaped notice until this weekend, when blogs began linking to the study. Techcrunch (http://www.techcrunch.com/) was among the first blogs to report the data's release.

According to these blogs, which were able to download the file, searches among some AOL users included one who conducted a series of searches on "how to kill your wife," "murder photo" and "www.murderdpeople.com" (sic).

Techcrunch said the most serious problem with the disclosure was that many people search their own names.

"Combine these ego searches with porn queries and you have a serious embarrassment. Combine them with "buy ecstasy" and you have evidence of a crime. Combine it with an address, social security number, etc., and you have an identity theft waiting to happen," said Techcrunch blogger Michael Arrington in a posting. "The possibilities are endless."

One legal expert said the disclosure probably did not violate the company's own privacy policy as the data did not include personally identifiable information.

"This is more of a business snafu than anything else," Jason Epstein, head of the business and technology group at law firm Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC said.

The link to the actual file, containing searches done by users whose personal IDs are replaced with random numbers, is no longer available on AOL's Web site.

"Although there was no personally identifiable data linked to these accounts, we're absolutely not defending this. It was a mistake, and we apologize," AOL's Weinstein said. "We've launched an internal investigation into what happened, and we are taking steps to ensure that this type of thing never happens again."

Will AOL Goof Trigger New U.S. Law?

The news that AOL released the search histories of 658,000 of its users is renewing calls for federal legislation to protect consumer privacy online.

In the wake of the disclosure, Representative Edward Markey (D-Mass.) urged his colleagues to take action on privacy legislation he proposed in February of this year.

"Technology is the engine which will drive our economy into the next century, but the success of this technology balances on the public trust," Markey said. "If 2005 was the year of the data breach, I want to make sure that 2006 is the year of safeguarding the privacy of American citizens by introducing legislation to prevent the stockpiling of private citizens

personal data."

Markey's bill is H.R. 4731, the Eliminate Warehousing of Consumer Internet Data Act (EWOCID). The bill would require Internet companies to destroy obsolete electronic data, and particularly data that could be used to individually identify consumers. The bill would also instruct the Federal Trade Commission to set up standards for the maintenance and destruction of data, and enforce the provisions of the law.

The language of the bill does not define when data should be declared "obsolete," and does allow companies to retain data for "legitimate business purposes" or to satisfy court orders.

"In this digital information age, the personal data we hand over to dozens of Web sites are the keys which unlock the personal lives and valuable possessions of millions of Americans," Representative Markey said. "This stored-up data about consumers' Internet use should not be needlessly kept in perpetuity, inviting data thieves or fraudsters, or disclosure through judicial fishing expeditions."

Markey's bill has languished in committee since it was introduced, and there is no indication from the Republican leadership in the House as to when any action will be taken on the bill."

Congress has typically taken a hands-off approach to privacy, but it has responded in the past to high-profile privacy invasions. During the Senate hearings on Judge Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court, for instance, reporters obtained lists of the movies he had rented (none were particularly salacious). Congress responded by passing the Video Privacy Protection Act, which bars the release of such information.

Some years earlier, a stalker obtained the address of actress Rebecca Schaeffer from the California Department of Motor Vehicles and shot her when she answered his knock at the door. That tragic event spurred passage of the federal Drivers Privacy Protection Act.

New Google Warnings Protect Internet Users

Google is taking a proactive approach to Web surfing security by issuing warnings about potentially harmful sites detected during an Internet search.

Through a partnership with StopBadware.org, which has a vast database of sites that distribute spyware, spam, and other potentially harmful Web pages, the search giant initially will caution users who attempt to click on such a site. An alert from Google will appear that says, "Warning - The website you attempted to visit has been reported to StopBadware.org as a site that hosts or distributes badware."

The advisory page identifies the possible risk and gives you the choice to return to the query results page or proceed to the questionable site. Down the road, the general warning will be replaced by the Stop Badware Coalition to include information specific to a site, such as a file-sharing network, that describes the potential problems.

Malicious software is wreaking havoc on many Internet users, by downloading Internet software that appear harmless at first glance, but can

adversely impact computer performance or usher in a flood of pop-up ads.

"This is a smart move by Google to protect its users, and marks a trend among companies looking to stem the tide of malware," said Forrester Research analyst Natalie Lambert. She noted that Microsoft is including a similar capability in the forthcoming Internet Explorer 7 browser, which will include an indicator that warns users against certain nefarious Web sites collected in a database and allows users to report such locations.

Others taking this approach include AOL, which has enlisted help from McAfee to safeguard its users. McAfee's Total Protection package includes a SystemGuards module, which monitors computers for specific behaviors that might signal virus, spyware, or hacker activity, and a plug-in called X-Ray for Windows, which is designed to detect and eliminate "root kits," i.e. hacker software.

The new SiteAdvisor tool is designed to identify potentially dangerous Web sites that contain spyware or adware. Findings are summarized with red, yellow, and green icons that provide users with an at-a-glance view of Web site ratings.

Anything that helps inform and safeguard consumers is a step in the right direction, Yankee Group analyst Jonathan Singer said.

Lambert concurred, pointing out that the distribution of malicious software is extensive, with hackers and cybercriminals creating official-looking destinations that are, in fact, "phishing" operations used to steal personal information.

"Warnings are essential in addressing this problem," says Lambert. "And the ability to quickly update the listings of questionable sites will certainly help."

New Trojan Disguises Malicious Traffic

Websense raised the alarm Tuesday of a phishing Trojan that uses a new technique to cloak its activity.

The San Diego-based Web security company said that the Trojan, which installs itself as an Internet Explorer helper object, waits for the user to enter information in specific Web site forms - particularly online banking sites - then zaps the stolen data back to the attacker.

What's unique about the new Trojan, said Websense, is that it delivers that data via ICMP packets. Keylogging Trojans usually transmit purloined usernames and passwords via e-mail or a HTTP POST command. Both can be easily spotted.

"Instead, this Trojan encodes the data with a simple XOR algorithm before placing it into the data section of an ICMP ping packet," Websense's warning read. "To network administrators and filtering software, the ICMP packet looks like legitimate traffic."

Websense confirmed the new technique's effectiveness by infecting a system with the Trojan, then entering account information into the SSL-protected Deutsche Bank Web site. As expected, the Trojan captured the information and sent an ICMP ping to a malicious remote server.

Utah Man Charged With Intercepting E-Mail

A Salt Lake City man faces up to 15 years in prison for allegedly intercepting the e-mail of two of his former bosses, the U.S. Department of Justice said.

William K. Dobson, 55, is charged with surreptitiously accessing the e-mail system of a Utah technology firm after he left the company. He has been indicted on two counts of intercepting electronic communications and one count of illegally obtaining information from a protected computer, the DOJ announced late Wednesday.

The DOJ did not release the name of Dobson’s former employer.

After Dobson left the company over business and financial disagreements, he accessed the company’s e-mail system twice to program it to send e-mail to an unauthorized inbox he created on the company’s system, the DOJ said.

Dobson allegedly routed the e-mail of the company’s chief executive officer and its vice president of engineering to this inbox.

He programmed his home computer to download the e-mail for longer than a month, until the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation searched his home in connection with the investigation, the DOJ said.

Dobson allegedly read many of the e-mail messages, containing both business and personal information, the DOJ said.

If convicted, Dobson faces a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison, a fine of up to $250,000, and restitution to the victims.

Teens Report Drop In Online Solicitation

Fewer youths are receiving sexual solicitations over the Internet as they become smarter about where they hang out and with whom they communicate online, researchers said Wednesday.

The findings, from a telephone-based survey sponsored by the government-funded National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, run counter to recent media reports and congressional hearings suggesting a growing danger of online predators as more youths turn to social-networking sites like MySpace.com.

"It may be signs people are paying (attention) to warnings they receive about online dangers," said Janis Wolak, one of the study’s authors and a professor at the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes Against Children Research Center. "They are being more cautious about who they are interacting with online."

But the study found that aggressive solicitations - the ones involving requests for contact by mail, by phone or in person - remained steady compared with a similar study five years earlier. And the report found growth in online harassment and unwanted exposure to pornography.

The report defines solicitation broadly as any request to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or give personal sexual information - as long as it was unwanted or came from an adult. Not all requests were deemed by the youth as distressing.

In the latest study of online youths ages 10 to 17, conducted from March to June 2005 as MySpace began its rapid ascent, 13 percent of respondents reported a sexual solicitation, compared with 19 percent in a 1999-2000 survey. In both studies, about 4 percent reported aggressive solicitations.

Many of the contacts came from other teens rather than adults, and few rose to the level of predation, the survey found.

"A significant portion of what they are calling sexual solicitation is merely teens being teens," said Nancy Willard, an online safety expert who helps schools develop programs and who was not involved in the study.

She said the drop should demonstrate to parents and policymakers that "the dangers are real but they are not as significant as they have been hyped in recent months."

Parents, school administrators and law-enforcement authorities have been increasingly warning of online predators at sites like MySpace, whose youth-oriented visitors are encouraged to expand their circles of friends through messaging tools and personal profile pages.

Lawmakers have responded by trying to restrict access to MySpace and other social-networking sites from schools and libraries that receive certain federal funds. A bill the House overwhelmingly passed last month is pending in the Senate.

Driven largely by word of mouth, MySpace has grown astronomically since its launch in January 2004 and is now the second-busiest site in the United States, according to comScore Media Metrix. The site, owned by News Corp., registered its 100 millionth user Wednesday; about 20 percent are registered as minors, according to the company.

MySpace’s usage was much smaller when the latest survey was conducted, but Wolak said she did not believe the conclusions would be different today. She said solicited kids had been engaging with strangers the same way, be it through a chat room, instant messaging or a social-networking site.

"People have fears that these crimes involve offenders and predators who look at these (social-networking) sites and then seek to identify these kids," Wolak said. "That’s not really what’s going on."

Researchers did find that in more than a quarter of the solicitations, youths were asked to submit sexual photographs of themselves, some of which may be a crime under federal child-pornography laws.

In general, youths responded to solicitations simply by leaving a Web site, blocking solicitors or ignoring them. Relatively few incidents, however, were reported to law enforcement or school administrators.

The survey of 1,500 children who had used the Internet at least once a month during the previous six months has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. Nearly 55,000 households were reached to find enough participants.

Microsoft Drops Name IE 7+

Microsoft Corp. has dropped the name Internet Explorer 7+, which was to be the name of the Web browser in the upcoming Windows Vista operating system.

After receiving "overwhelming" feedback - much of it negative - from people through its IE blog, Microsoft decided to stick with Internet Explorer 7 for Windows XP and Vista, rather than add the "plus" sign for the latter.

"We're switching the name back to Internet Explorer 7," Tony Chor, group program manager for IE, said in the blog on Friday. "No plus. No dot x. Just Internet Explorer 7."

While its unlikely the name would have made much difference in the use of IE in Vista, Microsoft was apparently showing some sensitivity to its users.

"We're glad we checked with you all before we shipped, so we didn't go out with an unpopular name," Chor said.

The consumer version of Windows Vista is scheduled to ship in January.

PayPal Cofounder Launches eBay Slide Show

Slide Inc. on Tuesday launched a free Web and desktop application that lets eBay Inc. sellers advertise their wares, and buyers keep track of favorite listings.

The tool lets eBay sellers take pictures of products and create a custom slide show of photos, news and other digital content to feature on eBay, blogs, wikis, Web sites, MySpace pages and more. Slideshow creators can incorporate photos from their collection, as well as feeds from other sites.

In limited trials since January, the service emerged with PayPal cofounder Max Levchin at the wheel. Working closely with Levchin is Slide's vice president of finance and operations Kevin Freedman, who said the photos stored in the listing template automatically update as content changes.

"The listings that expire automatically fall off, while new ones are added," he said.

Freedman says Slide could offer this service through other auction Web sites, along with ways to purchase and add audio capabilities to the slideshow.

The new tool elicited mixed reactions from buyers and sellers.

Tony Lee, a college student in Mclean, Va., who buys products from online auction sites, isn't impressed. Lee insists seeing the product in a slide show on the Web site won't influence his decision to make a purchase.

Buyers and sellers appear to see Slide from different sides. "I can see

this service working better for sellers than buyers," said Ankur Prasani, who works in high-tech Silicon Valley by day, and claims to make about "six figures" selling stuff on eBay at night.

Prasani has bought and sold electronics, such as iPods and other MP3 players, on eBay since 1998. "I use Mpire's auction manager tools to do something very similar," he said. "They create the slide show for you."

Slide has competitors such as eBay developers Auctiva, Andale and Mpire, for example. And on Monday, Apple Computer Inc. previewed its new operating systems Leopard that will include Web Clips that let anyone take a part of a Web page and create a visual panel that automatically updates as information changes.

More often than not, Ed Harrison sells the same items as others on eBay, so he's always looking for a gimmick to make his stand out.

"I'm in favor of anything that can give my entries more pizzazz," said Harrison, a 35-year-old eBay seller from Somerville, Mass., who uploads stock photos to the site to give a visual of the books and the CDs he sells. "Right now, I try to be clever with descriptions or titles, but often that doesn't really do the trick."

Any type of marketing tool to attract buyers is good, said Steve Grossberg, who built Budget Video Games Inc. into one of eBay's most active online merchants by selling games online for about $15 each.

Grossberg has already begun to test Slide as a marketing tool to showcase the variety of video games offered. When a buyer clicks on the photo slide gallery it doesn't take them away from the auction page, for example. Instead, clicking on the picture opens a new browser. "That's important to me as a seller," he said. "You don't want to take the buyer off that page."

AOL To Offer Personal Email Domains

AOL on Wednesday said it would start offering next month personalized email domains at no charge.

Called My eAddress, the service enables someone to choose any email address they wish using the .com or .net domains. As a result, a person could set up separate addresses for communicating with friends and family, and business colleagues. AOL is providing up to 100 addresses for each personal domain.

In choosing an address, a person can pick any name, group, or word before and after the "at" part of the address. People also have the option of choosing an address that uses the AOL.com domain.

The personalized addresses also can be used as their AOL instant messaging address and to access features across the AOL network. In the future, the addresses can be used as the address for personal Web pages on the AIM Pages social-networking service.

AOL, a division of Time Warner Inc., said this month that it would offer its paid Internet-access service and email at no charge to broadband users. The move is meant to counter the huge losses in subscribers, and to shift to a primarily ad-supported business.

What to Look For at LinuxWorld

Analysts predict that open source software vs. proprietary software will be a battle worth watching at the LinuxWorld Conference and Expo that opens next week in San Francisco. In a teleconference on Tuesday, analysts made predictions about overarching themes and debates that they hope to see played out at the event.

The Linux market is gaining speed, and conference organizers predict that this year's conference will be bigger than ever. In 2004, IDC predicted that revenue from Linux-based servers, desktops, and packaged software would exceed $35.7 billion by 2008. But while the demand for open source increases within the Linux market, developers are scratching their heads to figure out how to make the movement profitable.

"In terms of enterprise adoption, clearly we're seeing open source develop in the main stream," said Raven Zachary, senior analyst and practice head of open source at The 451 Group. "Attitudes have changed about open source. The way that vendors approach this is quite different. We're seeing not only a bottoms-up approach but also a top-down initiative."

In his research, Zachary found that the primary motivating factor for an enterprise to choose open-source products is cost savings.

"I think what we're seeing is that the financial benefits continue to be the primary reason for open source, so if cost savings is the driver, what impact is this going to have on open-source business models?" Zachary said.

Al Gillen, vice president of system software for IDC, said that vendors are figuring this jigsaw puzzle out quickly for fear of losing market share.

"Customers are starting to use the products widely and vendors are seeing that this is not going to go away," Gillen said. "Vendors are asking 'How do we take advantage of this?,' 'How do we leverage this?,' and 'What are the challenges of moving to an open source format from a proprietary format?' Companies are coming up with products and tools to allow users to build appliances based on an open-source format."

Another buzzword that analysts say to look for is "virtualization."

"If there is anything that is hot in the industry right now, its virtualization," Gillen said. "Everybody is asking how that is going to impact the market. Some of the things we are seeing are the negotiations, the wrangling, and the positioning with regard to developing the different levels of interoperability."

Gillen says that the industry will have to figure out how virtualization will effect licensing and the infrastructure of the Linux ecosystem.

LinuxWorld kicks off next Monday at the San Francisco Moscone Center. For details, visit www.linuxwordexpo.com.

Is Online Free Speech In Danger?

Freedom of speech online is under its fiercest threats in a decade because of two proposals in the U.S. Congress, the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) said.

"Free speech online is facing some of its most serious assaults" since the Child Online Protection Act (COPA) was passed in late 1998, said Leslie Harris, executive director of CDT, a civil liberties advocacy group. One of those proposals would require schools and libraries to block Internet chat and social networking tools.

The U.S. government continues to spend millions of dollars to fight successful court challenges to COPA, which required adult-themed Web sites to get proof of age before allowing Web surfers to access adult content, the CDT said this week.

On July 26, the House of Representatives passed the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA), which would ban social networking Web sites and instant messaging programs from schools and libraries. And a provision requiring Web sites with sexually related content to include warning labels is included in a wide-ranging broadband bill awaiting action in the Senate.

Both proposals go too far in their attempts to protect children from online pornography or sexual predators, the CDT said.

The adult labeling provision, authored by Senators Conrad Burns (R-Montana) and John Kerry (D-Massachusetts), requires any Web site with sexually explicit "depictions" to be labeled. Such a broad definition could mean that sites would have to include labels if they have text descriptions of sexual acts, sex education content, or videos with no nudity, said John Morris, director of the CDT's Internet Standards, Technology and Policy Project.

A site with PG-rated video including implied sex, with two people rolling around under blankets, may have to be labeled under the provision, Morris said.

Spokesmen for Burns and Kerry didn't immediately respond to a request for comments.

DOPA, sponsored by Representative Mike Fitzpatrick (R-Pennsylvania), would give the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) "remarkable power" to determine which Web sites and applications schools and libraries must block, Harris said. The legislation would require any schools or libraries receiving funding through the federal E-Rate program to block those sites or applications.

The broad labeling requirement likely violates the free speech protections in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Morris said. DOPA would add "a whole new category of social conversation" that's restricted speech, he said.

"99.999 percent of instant messages that minors participate in are healthy," Morris said. "And they're perfectly legal."

Apple's Junks Power Mac, Goes Pro with Xeon

It’s goodbye to the Power Mac and hello to the Intel-based Mac Pro, Apple’s Chief Executive Steve Jobs said at the opening of the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) Monday.

As in previous years, Jobs used his keynote speech at the annual show, which is taking place at the Moscone Center in San Francisco, to make strategic announcements about Apple’s products.

Jobs told the audience of Apple software developers that the Power Mac would fade away into history. He and his colleague Phil Schiller, Apple’s vice president of worldwide sales and marketing, then proceeded to give an outline of the Power Mac’s replacement, the Mac Pro.

Jobs also took a swipe at Microsoft’s new Vista operating system, telling his listeners that anyone wanting to use Vista should buy a Mac Pro running Tiger, the latest version of Apple’s operating system. Tiger already includes many of Vista’s features, he said.

"One never entirely knows what Steve Jobs is going to get up and announce," Michael Gartenberg, an analyst with New York-based consultancy Jupiter Research, said.

Gartenberg, who is attending the conference, said that there was no mention of any new iPods. "Apple does not tend to make announcements about the iPod at its developers’ conferences - new iPods tend to get announced in and of themselves," he said.

At last year’s conference, Jobs broke the news of the partnership between Apple and Intel. This announcement was the signal for Apple to start adding Intel chips in its desktop and laptop computers.

The new Mac Pro and the MacBook Pro, the lower-end version of the Mac Pro, both contain Intel’s Xeon dual-core 64-bit processor, which operates at speeds up to 3GHz. Schiller told the conference that the Mac Pro consists of two Xeon processors, 1GB of 667MHz memory, 250GB storage, and costs $2,499.

Leopard, which will be released next spring, will offer greater support for 64-bit applications. Jobs said that Leopard will include the final version of Boot Camp, Apple’s software which allows Intel-based Macs to run Microsoft’s Windows operating system. Boot Camp is currently in beta.

Jobs said that Leopard will include Front Row, Apple’s software for accessing photos, music, films and downloaded videos from a single interface. "It will also include a utility to restore data lost during a hard disk crash," he said.

"Jobs’ speech was as interesting for what it did not mention as for what it did tell us about Apple’s products," Gartenberg said. "For example, he didn’t talk about iLife or iSynch. What this told me was that there is a lot going on at Apple that they don’t want to talk about."

Apple Previews Leopard Operating System

Apple Computer showcased its Leopard operating system, due out next year, to the cheers of software developers gathered for a major conference.

With its trademark theatrical flair, the maker of Macintosh computers and iPod music players demonstrated new Leopard features that included playful "iChat" video-conferencing and a "Time Machine" that resurrects lost data.

"With our entire digital lives on the computer, Time Machine is none too soon," Apple chief executive Steve Jobs said in an opening speech to a packed auditorium. "We think iChat for Leopard is going to be a grand slam."

Apple gave a preview version of Leopard software to developers at the conference so they could begin crafting applications to complement the operating system, Jobs said.

"We are working very hard on this and think we will get it out next spring," Jobs said, disappointing some in the crowd who had hoped for an earlier release date.

More than 4,200 software developers from 48 countries registered for the week-long Apple conference, according to the company.

Rival Microsoft, whose software powers 90 percent of the world’s computers, plans to release its own new operating system, Vista, in January.

Apple executives taking part in the demonstration lampooned software colossus Microsoft and the delayed release of Vista.

"Our friends up north spend over five billion dollars on research and development and all they seem to do is copy Google and Apple," Jobs quipped, referring to Microsoft’s headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

"I guess money isn’t everything."

Jobs told the receptive audience that some Leopard features were going to be kept secret because "we don’t want our friends in Redmond to start their copiers any sooner than necessary."

"If you can’t innovate, I guess you imitate," Apple vice president of software engineering Bertrand Serlet said as a picture of an obese Elvis Presley impersonator was displayed on a wall screen behind him.

"But it is never quite as good."

Macintosh computers were gaining market share on Microsoft-based PCs, Jobs said, noting that Apple shipped 1.33 million in the last fiscal quarter.

Apple has been leveraging the popularity of its market-dominating iPod MP3 players into converts to its cult following of Macintosh users, according to industry analysts.

Leopard features touted at the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference 2006 were true to the company’s hip style and historical focus on making tasks easier for computer users.

"I am very impressed at the rate with which Apple introduces new technology into its operating system," said Mark Taylor, an engineer at Software Imaging Ltd. of Oxford, England.

"They have really been listening to responses from users."

Time Machine was inspired by a survey that indicated only 26 percent of

Macintosh users regularly backed up information on their machines to avoid losing it forever in system crashes.

The feature automatically copies music, pictures, applications, files and "absolutely everything" a person puts on their Macintosh, according to Apple vice president of platform experience Scott Forstall.

"If your hard drive dies you can buy a new hard drive, put it in the machine and be right back where you were before," Forstall told the gathering. "It is that easy to go back in time and bring back things you want to restore."

The operating system enabled people to remotely search for files on all computers connected to their network.

Leopard also had simple tools for people to create "widget" applications that stream feeds from websites onto small windows on computer screens.

For example, a Macintosh user could keep a continuously updated best-selling book list or the views from chosen web cameras on a desktop screen, Forstall demonstrated.

Leopard was also designed with better text-reading, Braille support, and closed captioning for people with disabilities, Jobs said.

Leopard e-mail would allow users to create the virtual equivalent of fancy stationery decorated with personal photographs. Modifications to iChat allowed people linked via web cameras to share slide show presentations, playfully distort their pictures or insert fake backdrops.

Court Rules Against Man In Porn-at-work Case

A Montana man who used his work computer to access child pornography does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy that would bar a search of the machine, a U.S. federal appeals court ruled on Tuesday.

Jeffrey Ziegler had argued that his Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable searches and seizures should prevent the government from using evidence that he had viewed many images of child pornography at work.

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals based in San Francisco cited similar past cases and found that even if some people lament the lack of privacy at work, the law was against Ziegler.

"Social norms suggest that employees are not entitled to privacy in the use of workplace computers, which belong to their employers and pose significant dangers in terms of diminished productivity and even employer liability," Diarmuid O’Scannlain wrote for a three-judge panel.

"Employer monitoring is largely an assumed practice, and thus we think a disseminated computer-use policy is entirely sufficient to defeat any expectation that an employee might nonetheless harbor."

Hackers Meet To Exploit Computer Flaws

In a dimly lit room off the main drag of a computer-security conference, programmers guzzle caffeine-laced drinks and wolf pizza while methodically hunting for cryptic messages hidden in the bowels of enemy territory.

They're looking for long strings of numbers and other clues that contest organizers have embedded within servers, the giant computers that perform critical tasks such as processing credit card transactions and granting employees remote network access. The game is the digital equivalent of capture the flag - but instead of kids trying to seize a tattered cloth in the backyard, these technophiles are searching for vulnerabilities that expose corporations and consumers to online criminals.

"There are more castle walls to defend, and each one is vulnerable to a different cannon ball," says Jason Spence, 26, a network security consultant donning a red fedora and blue tie during Defcon, one of the world's most important conferences for hackers, computer security professionals and government agents.

About 6,000 computer aficionados gathered at the annual three-day event in Las Vegas, which concluded Sunday. More than 500 contestants will have competed in capture the flag and 16 other Defcon games, considered a legal talent show for hackers - a way to show corporations, consumers and government agencies how vulnerable their networks are, without the risk of criminal prosecution or financial liabilities.

"The ability to do something that's socially unacceptable is always a thrill," says Chris Eagle, a computer science professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif.

Several rooms away, 17-year-old Dan Beard is readying a robot that took him four months to design. The machine shoots pellets using a camera that can see all of its 30 targets, which are the size of 50 cent pieces situated about 10 feet away. Most competing robots are equipped with cameras that can see only a fraction of the targets.

"I might not be the fastest, but I'm definitely going to hit most of them down," says Beard, a high school student in Newport Beach, Calif.

Other games include a lock-cracking tournament, where contestants armed with picks compete to be the first to open a door protected by a padlock, dead bolt and doorknob lock. This year's winner, 21-year-old Babak Javadi, beat out 67 other players.

Javadi, a student of computer engineering at Iowa State University in Ames, says he enjoys lock picking for the challenge and because it helps him visualize some of the more intangible aspects of computer programming. But he also credits the sport with helping manufacturers make more secure locks.

"There's a huge benefit from this hobby because vulnerabilities are found," he said.

Back in the room hosting the three-day capture-the-flag competition, empty pizza boxes and soft drink containers litter tables as the three-day game unfolded. Industrial beats from a band called Mindless Self Indulgence blast over a sound system while a short video animation of a scantily clad woman working an electric drill is beamed on one of the walls.

L@stplace, a team that has easily been in the lead since the contest began,

is suddenly seeing its position challenged by a group with a name not fit for print.

In less than an hour, the resurgent team has rallied with a volley of attacks, penetrating its opponents' servers and overwriting files. The team is scoring major points for increasing its number of "Pwns," hacker speak for possessing, or owning, an opponent's computer.

"We don't know where they're coming from," said Robert Hudock, a 33-year-old L@stplace member and Washington, D.C., attorney annoyed over the onslaught from the unmentionable team. "We're hanging by a thread."

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